

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 OMB-01 IO-14 DRC-01 /109 W

----- 056156

R 110815Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1352

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

UNCLAS BANGKOK 3961

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR/TH

SUBJ: CHAROONPHAN ON LAOS AND CAMBODIA

FOREIGN MINISTER CHAROONPHAN ISSARANGUN NA AYUTTHAYA HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE MARCH 6. FOLLOWING IS AN UNOFFICIAL USIS TRANSLATION OF HIS REMARKS ON THAI/LAOS RELATIONS.

REPORTER: WHAT ABOUT THE EMERALD BUDDHA ISSUE?

CHAROONPHAN: I WILL HAVE TO EXPRESS MY PERSONAL VIEW ON THIS ISSUE. I WAS THAI AMBASSADOR TO LAOS AT ONE TIME IN THE PAST AND I FEEL...IF ANY CLAIMS ARE MADE IT IS ON THE PART OF CERTAIN POLITICAL ELEMENTS...THERE IS IN CITEMENT AND GOADING TO CREATE BAD FEELING MUTUALLY. I DO NOT CONSIDER THIS TO BE OF ANY REAL SIGNIFICANCE BECAUSE TO MAKE SUCH A SUDDEN CLAIM LACKS JUSTIFIABLE REASONS AND IT IS ONLY A LOT OF TALK. (LAUGHTER) SHOULD THE ISSUE BE DISCUSSED AT LENGTH IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO DIG DEEP BACK INTO ANCIENT HISTORY, BECAUSE THE EMERAL BUDDHA DID NOT COME FROM LAOS ORIGINALLY, NEITHER DID IT COME FROM THAILAND, BUT IT CAME FROM INDIA...

REPORTER: WOULDN'T IT BE NECESSARY TO STUDY THE FORM OF
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SCULPTURE IN ORDER TO ASCERTAIN WHAT COUNTRY IT CAME FROM?

CHAROONPHAN: MY ADVICE IS FOR YOU TO GO AND INTERVIEW A PERSON WITH SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE ON THIS SUBJECT. GO AND INTERVIEW PRINCESS POON PISMAI BECAUSE SHE HAS CARRIED ON RESEARCH AND WRITTEN ON THE ORIGIN OF THE EMERALD BUDDHA...MY VIEW, HOWEVER, IS IT WOULD BE WISER NOT TO PLAY UP THIS ISSUE AT ALL. (LAUGHTER) THE TIME HAS NOT BEEN REACHED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. I FEEL THAT THERE IS A THIRD PERSON TRYING TO CREATE TROUBLE AND TO "MAR" THE GOOD RELATIONS EXISTING BETWEEN THAILAND AND LAOS, REGARDLESS WHETHER IT IS BY CLAIMING THE EMERALD BUDDHA OR BY INCITING A SEPARATIST MOVEMENT IN THAI TERRITORY ADJOINING LAOS. THESE EFFORTS ARE NOT ONLY TO CREATE BAD FEELING BETWEEN THAILAND AND LAOS BUT AMONG THE THAI PEOPLE THEMSELVES ALSO.

REPORTER: IS THERE ANY TRUTH IN THE REPORT THAT IF LAOS BECOMES UNITED THERE WILL BE DIVISION OF TERRITORY?

CHAROONPHAN: I DON'T SEE ANYTHING TO TAKE UP FOR CONSIDERATION BECAUSE THERE IS NO SUCH TREND AT ALL AT PRESENT. WE ARE CLOSELY WATCHING THE PLAN TO SET UP A COALITION GOVERNMENT IN LAOS AND SHOULD IT BE SET UP WITH SINCERITY, UNDER THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT AND UNDER THE PARIS AGREEMENT, I FEEL IT SHOULD OBTAIN GOOD RESULTS. WHY? BECAUSE THAILAND WANTS TO SEE LAOS BOTH INDEPENDENT AND NEUTRAL ALSO. WE WANT TO SEE AND ARE READY TO SUPPORT NEUTRALITY FOR COUNTRIES OF THIS AREA IF THEY ARE READY TO BE NEUTRAL. FOR INSTANCE, IN REGARD TO THE SETTING UP OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT IN LAOS, WE HAVE SEEN AND IT IS GENERALLY RECOGNIZED THAT PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA HAS ADOPTED A NEUTRAL ATTITUDE THROUGHOUT, THAT HE HAS WANTED TO BE NEUTRAL ALWAYS, AND HE HAS BEEN SUPPORTED BY BOTH BIG AND SMALL COUNTRIES IN GENERAL THROUGHOUT AND TO THIS DAY. THEREFORE, SHOULD HE BE THE PREMIER OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT, WE HOPE THAT THE PATHET LAO FACTION WILL RAISE NO OBJECTION, UNLESS THIS PATHET LAO FACTION PLANS TO COMMIT AGGRESSION OR TO CHANGE THE LAO GOVERNMENT INTO A COMMUNIST ONE. BUT SHOULD THE PATHET LAO FACTION POSSESS SINCERITY IN SETTING UP A

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COALITION GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO SAFEGUARD NEUTRALITY, AND SHOULD IT PERFORM WORK WITH NO AGGRESSIVE ACTIVITIES, LAOS WILL BE ABLE TO SET ITSELF UP STABLY, REMEDYING ITS ECONOMIC SITUATION AND REBUILDING ITS COUNTRY AND MAKING IT PROGRESSIVE AND PROSPEROUS. SHOULD THERE BE DISUNITY OR DIFFERENCES THAT CANNOT BE OVERCOME ANYWHERE, THAT COUNTRY WILL BECOME STEADILY WEAKER. THEREFORE, I FEEL OPTIMISTIC AND HOPE

FOR THE BEST....

REPORTER: A PROBLEM WE ARE FACED WITH IS THAT NORTH VIETNAM HAS SENT ARMED FORCES INTO LAOS NEAR THE BORDER WITH THAILAND. WHAT PREPARATION IS THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS MAKING TO COPE WITH THIS PROBLEM,

CHAROONPHAN: THAT IS OCCURRING IN LAOS TERRITORY. SHOULD WE MAKE ANY MOVE IT WOULD BE TANTAMOUNT TO INTERFERENCE. WE ARE FOLLOWING UP THIS REPORT CLOSELY WITH A FEELING OF UNEASINESS. THIS MEANS THAT WE MUST KEEP CLOSE WATCH... IF DANGER THREATENS US ANYWHERE AND FROM ANY DIRECTION, OUR ARMED FORCES AND OUR POLICE WILL BE ON THE ALERT AND IN FULL READINESS TO PROTECT OUR COUNTRY. SINCE I WAS OUR AMBASSADOR TO LAOS AT ONE TIME IN THE PAST, I KNOW THAT THAT BORDER IS A WEAK POINT. I REMEMBER THAT WHEN I WAS CHIEF OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIA DIVISION I HAD TO FLY TO NEW YORK IN ORDER TO REPORT ON THE ACTION OF THE COMMUNISTS IN SEIZING THAKHAEK, WHICH IS OPPOSITE NAKHON PHANOM... THE COMMUNISTS REMAINED THERE FOR ABOUT A MONTH. WE HAD TO GO TO NEW YORK TO MAKE A COMPLAINT TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL, BUT WHEN I ARRIVED THERE I RECEIVED A REPORT THAT THE COMMUNIST TROOPS WHICH HAD SEIZED THAKHAEK HAD WITHDRAWN ALREADY. WHEN I WENT TO LAOS I MADE AN ON-THE-SPOT STUDY TO FIND OUT WHY THAT POINT WAS SO VULNERABLE. I DISCOVERED THAT ABOUT SIX KILOMETERS FROM THE BANK OF THE MEKONG RIVER THERE IS A PASS BETWEEN MOUNTAINS, THEREFORE GOVERNMENT FORCES CAN SAFEGUARD THAT GATEWAY EASILY, BUT BEYOND THAT IT IS JUNGLE IN WHICH PATHET LAO TROOPS HAVE INFILTRATED, THUS MAKING IT A WEAK POINT....

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, PRESS CONFERENCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 MAR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974BANGKO03961
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740354/aaaabynv.tel
Line Count: 146
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: shawdg
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 JUL 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 JUL 2002 by elbezefj>; APPROVED <06 DEC 2002 by shawdg>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CHAROONPHAN ON LAOS AND CAMBODIA FOREIGN MINISTER CHAROONPHAN ISSARANGUN NA AYUTTHAYA HELD A
TAGS: PFOR, TH, CB, (CHAROONPHAN ISSARANGUN NA AYUTTHAYA)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005